

## Bings' Bargain

By LAURA ALTON FAYNE

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"What dat, Bings?" cooed the dimpled cherub, patting the bald spot that spread like a small shining desert in an oasis of thick blond hair on Bings' well shaped head.

Whitlock grinned.

"Mamma's pet mustn't be naughty," said the pretty widow, turning her brown eyes apologetically on Bings.

"Come to mamma, dearie. Mr. Bings isn't used to babies."

But the dimpled cherub, otherwise Baby Moffatt, who had purposely and after many backslidings climbed upon the rustic seat occupied by Bings, for whom she had evinced a decided partiality from the start, only sauged the closer to the secretly delighted Bings and cooed, "Baby love Bings," then as a happy afterthought, "Mamma love Bings," at which frank and wholly unexpected revelation of her small daughter the pretty widow's face rivalled Bings'.

Whitlock guffawed. "Now's your chance, Bings," he urged, with malicious levity at his rival's discomfiture. But Bings, with a hasty adieu, fled, leaving the cherub disconsolate.

Bings metaphorically kicked himself all the way home for not taking advantage of the best opportunity he had ever had, even if it was before the sneering Whitlock, and for his cowardly desertion of the pretty widow to Whitlock's canonic rally.

Bings paused at his own gate and gazed miserably at the big silent house. He shut his eyes a moment and imagined he saw the pretty widow and the cherub sitting on the front porch. It was a blissful vision, but Bings felt that it would never become a blissful reality unless a miracle happened.

Bings was a bachelor, Bings was big and blond and bald, Bings was a whole swarm of "B's." He narrowly escaped being a beauty, with his baby complexion and innocent blue eyes. His size was the only thing that saved him from this terrible fate. Moreover, Bings was a bargain fiend. No woman could scent a bargain said farther off than could Billy Bings. Incidentally Billy was the climax to Bings' woes. But no persuasion on his part could convince his friends of the absurdity of calling a six footer Billy.

Bings' bachelorhood was a condition of neither birth nor achievement—it was thrust upon him. During his boyhood upon that state there had been any one of a dozen maids and widows that Bings would have been only too happy to have endowed with half his worldly goods but for his excessive bashfulness. Never yet had he been able to screw his courage up to the point of proposal, though he had made almost superhuman efforts in that direction.

This seemed a pity, for Bings was undeniably cut out for a Benedict. He thought all women angels and all babies cherubs.

As he started uptown on the momentous morning after his precipitate flight Bings had a particular cherub in mind—a pretty, brown eyed, dimpled cherub that he would have given half he was worth to possess and the other half to possess the cherub's pretty, brown eyed mother. But so far every glance from Mrs. Jessie Moffatt's roguish eyes had produced the unfortunate effect of instantaneous paralysis of poor Bings' tongue, so that he could only stand dumb or blush and stammer like any silly schoolboy.

This was not the first time by any means that Bings had performed that metaphorical feat. It had been at least a semi-weekly occurrence for several months past. Each time Bings vowed that the next time he would not act the fool. But he did. He had reached the point where the inevitable mental feat was copiously punctuated with a vigorous ejaculation that would have shocked the pretty widow had she heard it.

Bings felt his helplessness bitterly. So absorbed was he in this thought as he picked his way along the shady street that he failed to observe the widow a block or so ahead of him. A deep gloom enveloped Bings' soul that bright June morning.

"Confound it!" he muttered. "If something doesn't happen soon I'll—"

"Going, going—gone!"

Bings pricked up his ears and hastened his steps. An auction, and he not to know it? Turning a corner, he came full upon a familiar scene just as a table was knocked down to the highest bidder. Bings' eyes glared over the unusual display of household goods spread before him.

"Fifty cents!" bid a voice in the crowd as the auctioneer held up an article. It was Whitlock's voice. Bings' wrath flamed up, and before he had time to think he was bidding furiously against his rival. Fast in the grip of "bargain fever" and whetted on by Whitlock, Bings rapidly became possessor of various articles that were of as much use to him at that period of his existence as a celestial harp and a pair of wings. Had Bings intercepted the exchange of winks between Whitlock and the auctioneer he might have been more cautious. As it was, the barricade around Bings grew and grew.

"Going, going—gone!" shouted the auctioneer. "Dirt cheap at that, Mr. Bings. Here, Sam, wheel this perambulator around to Mr. Bings."

"Perambulator? Heavens! Had he bought a perambulator? Bings wiped his perspiring brow and gazed sedately around.

"Why, Bings," cried a laughing

feminine voice at his elbow. "What do you want with a perambulator?" Bings' exasperated gaze encountered that of Mrs. Marston, a merry faced woman. By her side stood the pretty widow with the coveted cherub, clinging to her hand.

Bings turned fiery red and caught wildly at his hat, or where he supposed it to be, only to find that he was fanning himself with it. Making an embarrassed bow, he began to mop his perspiring face violently.

"Here's your perambulator," said Sam, ironically, pausing in front of Bings. Bings turned fascinated eyes on the thing, which seemed to him to have greatly increased in size during its progress from the auctioneer's stand.

"And a baby's high chair," announced another laughing voice as the speaker craned forward and inspected Bings' barricade.

"There was a general grating of necks. "And a little red rocker," exclaimed another.

"A doll—and a doll carriage."

"A child's cot."

"Footstool, workbasket, sewing chair and sewing machine," enumerated Whitlock, pushing nearer. "Great Jupiter, Bings! What does this mean?" with mock severity.

Poor Bings thanked his stars that none of them knew of that cradle in the attic, the result of a former aberration. He gazed helplessly around at his tormentors, then at his barricade. What on earth had induced him to bid in all that stuff?

He had made himself so ridiculous in her eyes he'd not stand a ghost of a show now. The only thing left for him to do was to make his escape as best he could.

Bings glanced furtively around, but all avenues were closed by laughing faces. He grew desperate. Just as he was contemplating a dash for liberty along the line of the least resistance the miracle that he had been so skeptical about happened.

A fractious horse, a woman's scream, a scene of confusion, and when Bings came to he found his arms around the pretty widow, who was clasping the cherub to her breast and sobbing hysterically on his shoulder: "Oh, Billy—dear, dear Billy! Save me, save me!"

At these inspiring words Bings' courage rose to the occasion, his bashfulness slipping from him like a cloak. Before the astonished eyes of the whole staring crowd he bent and kissed the pretty widow and the dimpled cherub. "There, there, sweetheart," he said soothingly, "the danger is past. Then, turning to the gaping crowd, Bings lied magnificently.

"I was just going to explain," said he, "when that confounded horse interfered, that I bought these things for my wife and child. The fact is—"

"Mr. Bings!" protested a shocked but smothered voice.

"Mrs. Moffatt and I expect to be married just a week from today, and I take this occasion to invite—"

"Billy Bings! How dare you?"

"The whole crowd to attend. The fact is—the sight of Whitlock's amazed and wholly skeptical countenance stimulated Bings to greater invention—"

"we would have announced our engagement sooner but for certain unforeseen circumstances that—er—caused us to—er—await a more propitious time. But—"

"Oh, Billy, hush!"

"After next Thursday we'll be at home to our friends. You all know the way to The Elms, where you'll always find—"

"Oh, Billy, dear!"

"—a welcome."

—An Artist's Joke.

Holman Hunt, who began life as a clerk to an auctioneer and estate agent, was constantly drawing portraits when he should have been drawing up leases, and in his chosen profession he was never slow to seize the flying moment.

"I won't buy your oranges," he said to an old woman who had entered the office in search of a customer, "but I'll paint your portrait." Old Hannah was delighted, and thereupon she was put on paper in her habit as she lived, her basket on her head and an orange in her hand. But one incident of this artist's life never ceased to afford him amusement. The windows in his room were made of ground glass, and as he had little to do he spent much of his time in drawing flies upon its roughened surface. A blot of ink sufficed for the body, and some delicate pencil strokes for the wings, and at a distance the deception was perfect. Day by day the number increased, and one morning his employer came in, stepped before the window and exclaimed: "I can't make out how it is. Every day that I come into this room there seem to be more and more flies!" And, taking out his handkerchief, he attempted to brush them away.

Primitive Diseases.

In ancient days sweet odors were obtained by burning aromatic gums and woods; hence the word perfume, which is from the Latin per, through, fums, smoke, or vapor. From this arose the idea of incense in primitive worship. It was used by the orientals long before it became known to the western world. People of the east utilized it for sacrifice in their temples. At feasts it enhanced the pleasure of the senses. At funerals it was a bribe to appease the manes of the dead, and later, in theaters, a disinfectant against the unpleasant odors of a crowded building. Pliny assures us that incense was not employed in sacrifice; that after the Trojan war, when fragrant woods were applied to give an agreeable smell. In an ancient magical manuscript it is depicted that three grains should be taken, with three fingers, and placed under the threshold to keep away evil spirits which might come in the form of children.

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LEGENDS OF OLD MINES.

The Value of the Records of Past Production.

American mining engineers are familiar with speculative schemes, based upon the real or supposed former productiveness of the mines upon which they are started. To say nothing of such enterprises as that of Richard Burton, who thought he had rediscovered in Egypt the source of Solomon's treasure (itself somewhat mythical), there are more recent instances in abundance. The books of Humboldt and Ward on Mexico gave rise in the first half of the nineteenth century to an immense and disastrous investment of English capital in the unwatering of old Mexican gold and silver mines on the strength of reports from "government archives" showing their immense production and sundry legends, accounting for their temporary abandonment. In the prospectuses of such schemes, references to pestilence, war, quarrels among owners, etc., as the causes of the interruption of an almost incredibly profitable business are well known features.

No doubt all ancient evidence, whether historical or legendary, has its value for mining enterprises, but it is well to bear in mind that Mexican miners did not usually leave rich ore when they stopped working a mine, and there is another proposition, applicable to many mines outside of Mexico, yet too often overlooked—namely, the record of past production is a measure not of what is left, but of what is not left, in the ore deposit of a mine.—Engineering and Mining News.

GOOD CHEER AT MEALS.

The Value of Laughter as an Aid to Digestion.

Nothing else will take the place of good cheer and laughter at meals or any other time in the home. There is a vital connection between amiability and digestion—between good cheer and assimilation. Laughter is the best friend the liver has and depression or melancholia its worst enemy. Numerous experiments have shown that mirth and cheerfulness stimulate the secretion of the gastric juices and are powerful aids to digestion. Yet, knowing this, many of us sit as gloomy and absorbed at the table as at a funeral. In many homes scarcely a word is spoken at meals outside of requests for an article of food.

The meal hour ought to mean something besides supplying a mere animal function. The bell which calls the family to the table ought to be the signal for a good time generally, when all cares should be thrown off and everybody appear at his best. It ought to signalize the time for mirth and laughter. It ought to be looked forward to by the members of the family as the recess or nooning is looked forward to by pupils in school as a let-up from the strenuous life.—Orison Swett Marden in Success Magazine.

Mushrooms.

An enthusiast on the subject of mushrooms says there is no more reason to mistake a good mushroom for a poisonous toadstool than to confound nightshade with huckleberries. The distinctions are clear and simple and easily learned. Real mushrooms are known by their beautiful pink gills, not reaching the stem, which stem carries a well marked white woody ring; by the very fleshy down covered top, the delicious and enticing fragrance, the firm, white flesh, sometimes inclined to pink when cut or broken. One or two rules in regard to gathering mushrooms, we are told, will remove all the peril from the pursuit of them. Examine carefully every specimen you gather. If at all doubtful, throw it away. Show it to somebody that knows. Never cook mushrooms unless you know they are gathered by somebody that knows.

Bow Legged Men.

Do not revile the bow legged man, for he plays an important part in the world. It is estimated that 40 per cent of mankind are bow legged, so numerically this class is entitled to great respect. Bow legs invariably accompany a robust physique. We find them one of the conspicuous features of athletes. Comedians are almost always bow legged. Of the bow legged geniuses to which humanity points with pride the most illustrious examples are Caesar, Horace, Napoleon, Wellington, Schopenhauer and Cavour, the celebrated Italian statesman.—London Answers.

The Bright Side.

Words of cheer are words of help; words of gloom are words of harm. There is a bright side and a dark side to every phase of life and to every hour of time. If we speak of the bright side, we bring the brightness into prominence; if we speak of the dark side, we deepen its shadows. It is in our power to help or to hinder by a word any and every person with whom we come in contact.

In the Hall of Fame.

"His father is in the hall of fame." "Why, I didn't know the old gentleman was dead." "Have to be dead to be in there?" "Sure." "Well, he is only in there dusting the busts."

The Limit.

The height of superiority was voiced the other day by a commuter who said that he regarded a certain man, then under discussion, as the fourth ball to a pinball machine's sign.—Puck.

Parson met a victory too far. He had conquered well that has made his name by. Then, the next day, he was a defeated hero, which may rule the day.—George Herbert.

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